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General Assembly

Sixty-fifth session

Official Records

110th plenary meeting
Monday, 25 July 2011, 10 a.m.
New York

President: Mr. Deiss ..... (Switzerland)

The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Expression of sympathy with Norway

The President (*spoke in French*): It is my sad duty to convey, on behalf of the General Assembly, our deepest condolences to the Government and people of Norway in connection with the recent tragedy that has affected the country.

I give the floor to the representative of Norway.

Mr. Saether (Norway): This youth conference ought to be about the rights and values that were attacked last Friday. It should be about the right and opportunity of young people to participate in public life, to shape and express their own opinions, to organize freely and to speak out against their own country's leadership or political system if they so deem necessary.

On Friday, around 700 young people were gathered on the island of Utøya exercising exactly those inherent and, in our view, inviolable rights. They were driven by their belief in democracy, diversity and inclusiveness. They were convinced that they had a right and a duty to take part in political life; that only through active participation could they help to develop Norway further; and that, through active participation, they would help to ensure that Norway continued to play a positive role in international affairs as a partner in solidarity with other peoples and countries. Those were the sentiments and convictions that prevailed on that island in the afternoon of last Friday. Those were the values that evil set out to destroy.

The terrorist attack seems to have been the act of a single Norwegian man, who defined himself as deeply conservative and a Christian. Through that heinous act, he hoped to reverse Norway's policy of tolerance and inclusion, not least towards Islam. The attacks were the deadliest in Norway since the Second World War. The bombing of the Government complex and the massacre of young people gathered for the annual Labour Party summer youth camp struck at the very heart of Norwegian democracy.

More than 80 young people were shot and killed one by one. Those killed were part of Norway's political future. Their surviving friends have pledged not to be intimidated by the atrocity. They will not be terrorized into silence. By staying engaged, they will demonstrate that violence against opinion is ineffective. Thus, they will also honour their dead friends.

In fact, over the years, the Labour youth of Norway has sent many youth representatives to the United Nations. We trust that they will do so again. As Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg, himself once a youth representative to the United Nations, said, we will respond to the attack with even more democracy, more openness, more participation and more humanity.

At this time of national tragedy, Norway stands united in grief and in our determination to uphold the values of our democracy: openness, trust and participation regardless of background. We are grateful for and heartened by all the warm words and expressions of condolence and sympathy to the

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families and friends of the victims and to the people of Norway.

I would like to conclude by quoting a young female survivor from the island. She said the following: "If one man can show so much hate, imagine how much love we all can show each other."

Agenda item 27 (*continued*)

High-level Meeting on Youth

Social development

(b) Social development, including questions relating to the world social situation and to youth, ageing, disabled persons and the family

Draft resolution (A/65/L.87)

The President (*spoke in French*): I now declare open the High-level Meeting of the General Assembly on Youth. This meeting is held in accordance with resolution 65/267 of 15 March 2011.

It is a pleasure for me to welcome participants to New York today for the opening of our High-level Meeting on Youth. More than 500 young people have joined us from the entire world for this event. I am very pleased about that, and thank them for taking part in this meeting, which would not have the same vibrancy without them. I also most particularly thank Alek Wek, a symbolic figure of commitment for young people, and the other representatives of youth organizations whom we will have the opportunity to hear shortly.

Today, the body of young people aged 15 to 24 numbers more than 1 billion girls and boys, the vast majority of whom live in developing countries. Despite the progress made in achieving internationally agreed development goals, in particular the Millennium Development Goals, many young people live in areas where poverty still remains a major challenge. Their lives are sometimes threatened by extreme physical conditions, such as the ongoing drought and famine in Somalia, in particular. It is often difficult for young people to access basic social services, education, vocational training and quality health care. That is especially true for girls and young women. Their job opportunities and prospects for socio-economic development are limited.

In order to draw the international community's attention to the position of young people, in December 2009, the General Assembly adopted resolution 64/134 proclaiming the year commencing on 12 August 2010 the International Year of Youth. The theme for the Year was dialogue and mutual understanding. We thereby sought to promote the ideals of peace, respect for human rights and solidarity among generations, cultures, religions and civilizations. We sought to promote a culture of dialogue and understanding among and with young people as key stakeholders and actors in today's world.

The events that have marked these past months in the Arab world, in particular, have indeed shown us the extent to which young people are major actors in our societies and how they are a force for change when they mobilize. Young people are moved by ideals of peace, friendship and openness to others and to their differences. They are often more tolerant than their elders. They are more creative and very often more disposed to innovation.

Young people are enthusiastic supporters of new technologies and novelty in general, such as mobile telephones and social networks as elements of inclusion and social integration. Young people are ready to adopt greener and more sustainable alternative lifestyles. Experience has also shown us how young people participate in the fight against AIDS and how they can help to make a difference in combating hunger and poverty.

We should draw more on the energy and enthusiasm of young people. Our societies need them. We should create the conditions to enable young people to fully exercise their rights, to flourish and to fulfil their aspirations. We should work for and with young people.

The Meeting opening today offers us a unique opportunity to strengthen international cooperation in order to meet the challenges facing young people in their daily lives, to create opportunities for them to flourish and to help, with them, to build societies that are more respectful of people and their environment. We need to ensure the full participation of young people in society, give them access to basic services, education and quality health care, and offer them prospects for decent and productive employment.

If the Year of Youth is to be effective, it needs to leave us, through the outcome document to be adopted

at the end of this meeting (A/65/L.87), a legacy commensurate with the goals that I have just outlined. I thank Ambassadors Jean-Francis Zinsou of Benin and Thomas Mayr-Harting of Austria for their efficient handling of the negotiation process and for their commitment. I am delighted that the views of nearly 100 youth organizations have so far been taken into account in the negotiations.

In general, the importance of a close dialogue with young people and organizations led by young people has been evident throughout the International Year of Youth.

We must strengthen partnerships and continue to set up channels for cooperation, dialogue and information-sharing between Governments and organizations led by young people and other partners in civil society and the private sector. I call on Member States to make a firm commitment to implementing policies and programmes at the national, regional and international levels, in accordance with the goals set forth in our declaration. It is also important that United Nations entities continue to strengthen their coordination and increase their efforts towards a more coherent and integrated approach in order to maximize their impact on the development of young people.

I am confident that we will seize every opportunity for dialogue and interaction in order to make this High-level Meeting and the International Year of Youth a success. I wish representatives constructive deliberations on the basis of mutual respect, understanding, openness and a spirit of inquiry.

I now give the floor to the Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. Ban Ki-moon.

The Secretary-General: Let me first share my shock over the terror attack in Norway on Friday. I condemn such violence in the strongest possible terms. I am particularly saddened that the murderer singled out young people keen to engage meaningfully in the future of their country. That atrocity stands in stark contrast to the theme of this meeting, which is "Youth: dialogue and mutual understanding". I called Prime Minister Stoltenberg on Saturday and told him that I was moved by his consoling and principled message to his fellow citizens, which underlined Norway's values of tolerance, respect and commitment to international cooperation. My condolences go to the families of the bereaved and to the Government of Norway.

Let me now turn to today's event. I am pleased to be here today as we conclude the International Year of Youth. I am grateful to the many Heads of State and Government and ministers who have joined us, and I particularly welcome the large contingent of young people here today. Their energy always gives me a lift, as does their sense of style. Ms. Wek is, of course, an icon of style, but more importantly, she is an example of an inspiring ending to what could have been one more of many, many tragic stories. Earlier this month, I had the enormous pleasure of attending the independence ceremonies of the country of Ms. Wek's birth — South Sudan, the newest member of the community of nations. Ms. Wek and I will both work in our own ways to help the 193rd State Member of the United Nations achieve the peace and prosperity it seeks. South Sudan will need the full support of the international community, and the country's young people can and must play a central role.

I have visited Mr. Dantas's country twice in the past two years, though regrettably not his home city of São Paulo. I met with young people in Rio's Babilônia favela, and talked with them and young people from other favelas. Not all have had Mr. Dantas's good fortune to escape violence and drugs, receive an education and find work. Meeting them made me think of the more than 1 billion young people in today's world, the vast majority of whom live in developing countries. Some receive a good education and can look forward to decent jobs and rewarding lives, but too often young people lack the education, freedom and opportunities they deserve. Unemployment rates for young people are three to six times those for adults, and informal, low-wage and insecure work is the norm. This is especially true for young women, the disabled and indigenous youth. Increasingly, young people are saying to their elders and to their Governments: "This is not the world we want."

That clear conviction is part of what has made the past year a momentous one for youth. In Tunisia, which initiated resolution 64/134 proclaiming the International Year of Youth, young people have been at the centre of a movement for change that is sweeping North Africa and the Middle East. We all know the story of Mohamed Bouazizi, the Tunisian street vendor who set himself on fire last December. He was a young man, 27 years old, tired and frustrated with the privations and indignities of life. He saw so little future for himself and his countrymen and women that he

sacrificed himself. His death was tragic, but the fire he lit led to the downfall of two autocrats, first in Tunisia, then in Egypt. The fires have travelled far since then.

The Facebook generation is showing a growing resolve to change our world and a capacity to make things happen. They are bringing their energy and courage to some of the most difficult issues we face. Young people are standing up for the rights of those who suffer discrimination based on gender, race or sexual orientation. They are confronting sensitive issues, talking to their peers and working to stop the spread of HIV and AIDS. And they are leading the charge to adopt a green model for development. Young people often understand better than older generations that we can and must transcend our religious and cultural differences in order to reach our shared goals.

Our job is to work for and with them to make sure they can inherit the world they want — the world promised by the United Nations Charter, built on dialogue and mutual understanding. The international community must work to expand the horizons of opportunity for young women and men and answer their legitimate demands for dignity and decent work. The global economic crisis and austerity measures in many countries are constraining those opportunities. When young people lack opportunity, they are more easily led to crime and violence, drugs and risky sex, and the slippery slope down to the bottom of the social scale. Failing to invest in our youth is a false economy. Conversely, investing in young people will pay great dividends for all.

The United Nations is doing a considerable amount to invest in youth. We are acquiring knowledge and best practices about the issues affecting young people today, and we are making greater efforts to engage youth in our negotiating and decision-making processes. Still, I do not think we have gone nearly far enough.

I should like to go over the heads of the members of the General Assembly and ask the youth representatives one or two questions: "Are we doing enough for you? Can we do more?" I think we can and must do more for our young people. They are the leaders of tomorrow. My peers and I may be the leaders of today, but it will be the young who will stand here and lead the world tomorrow.

Next June, the United Nations will gather in Rio for one of the most important meetings in the Organization's history. The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) will help to determine our collective future. That is why it is such a priority for me, and I hope and expect that it will be a top priority for the Heads of State and Government of all Member States.

I have called climate change the defining issue of our time. Indeed, we must go even further. We must make sustainable development for all the defining issue of our time, because it is only in that broader framework that we can address climate change and the needs of our citizens.

Young people can and must play a central role in bringing dynamic new ideas, fresher thinking and energy to the Rio+20 process. We should all work to engage them and ensure that their voices are heard. One way we may consider doing this is through the United Nations youth delegate programme. I welcome the programme delegates who are here today. By including young people in national delegations to United Nations meetings, Governments not only help young people to gain a better understanding of the complexities of the negotiations, but they also gain an insight into the needs and views of youth. The role and responsibility of leaders is to listen and respond to the legitimate aspirations of their people, including young people.

The youth delegate programme is an important opportunity for young people to represent themselves meaningfully on the international stage. I therefore recommend that all States Members of the United Nations review their participation in that important programme and that all parties — youth, United Nations entities and Government — to evaluate how their programmes related to youth can link with it.

The International Year of Youth may be coming to a close, but our obligations to young people remain. That means promoting a culture of dialogue and mutual understanding, and it means tackling the pressing issues of our times: climate change, nuclear disarmament, women's and children's health, strengthening democracy, achieving the Millennium Development Goals and ensuring sustainable development that benefits all people while protecting the planet. It also means strengthening global solidarity.

The famine in parts of Somalia is only the latest test. We live in a changing and volatile world. Only by

working together can we meet our challenges. To do so, we need youth on our side — indeed, in the vanguard. Young people are willing and able to take ownership of their own future and the common ideas we cherish. Let us embrace this energy, creativity and idealism for the benefit of all, in particular for young people.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank the Secretary-General for his statement.

Pursuant to resolution 65/267 on the organization of this High-level Meeting on Youth, I now give the floor to Ms. Alek Wek, international supermodel, humanitarian, author and, above all, young person.

Ms. Wek: I am very honoured to be here. I will introduce myself. My name is Alek Wek. Representatives here may not recognize me as I work in fashion as a runway model. I left my homeland of Southern Sudan, where I grew up in the very small town of Wau, at the age of 12. I do not sound like I am from Southern Sudan because I left for London. My family and I had to flee and I had to live in London as a refugee. I did not see my mother for two years, which was very emotional.

However, growing up in the south of Sudan was wonderful. I really enjoyed it very much — playing with my mother and learning from her every day in life. And, of course, I was a daddy's girl. My mother always told me, "Stop being naughty!", because I was a tomboy, but daddy was wonderful. I enjoyed my childhood very much. However, I have always felt very sensitive about what other people were going through, even though I was blessed to have left the country, having lost my father. He really embedded in me something that he always said: "If you believe in something, you have to follow it all the way through." I truly believe in that and would not otherwise have grown into the woman I am, still learning and drawing inspiration from others. I have now come to a place where I can truly appreciate that inspiration comes from the people around us. I am very touched by that.

On that note, to be brief, I truly believe that children are not only our future; they are the here and now. Looking at how we grow as people, I believe that if we can help young people, it will be they who determine who we are as a nation. I am so touched at the fact that the United Nations has come on board and said, "This is it". The people have spoken in South Sudan; they did not just vote 50, 60 or 70 per cent, or whatever number it is; people have really united, and I think that this is a start. So I created "Working to educate kids" — not to promote that right now, but truly it is to be able to come together and help.

Let me tell you a little story. When I went back in 2005 with my mother to do a documentary with BBC One, I saw an 18-year-old girl teaching kids under a tree, and not just little stories. The 18-year-old could not further her education, but she wanted to teach the younger ones, and that was really touching for me. Just small things that at times we may take for granted, but for me it was very touching. Doctors without Borders, the United States Committee for Refugees, down there when the war was really worse, were helping to save lives, and that for me was very touching.

I do not know what else to say; I do not want to take a lot of the Assembly's time. But I think that it is very important to stress the importance of not just educating our young ones but truly taking them on board, because if we do not do so, there is no hope, and I think the hope is right now. It's very exciting. What can I say — woo-hoo for South Sudan. Independence — now we can start to rebuild.

I am just really touched. I am thankful. I truly appreciate it. I am very shy as a person, and not just on the runways. It's easy; I do my thing. What else can I say? I don't want to ramble on, so I guess I will have to wrap it up. I hope that we can do something for the young people, not just in South Sudan but in general, and I very much appreciate this moment.

The President (*spoke in French*): I congratulate Ms. Alek Wek and wish to convey to her the Assembly's satisfaction at the fact that her country, South Sudan, has been admitted to membership in the United Nations.

I now give the floor to Mr. Romulo Dantas of Brazil, Secretary for Youth Empowerment of the World Alliance of YMCAs.

Mr. Dantas (World Alliance of YMCAs): I wish all present here today a very good High-level Meeting. It is not every day that I have the opportunity to invite Mr. Ban Ki-moon, Mr. Joseph Deiss, Mr. Shaaban and Ms. Alek Wek to come and visit my old street.

I come from São Paulo, Brazil, from one of the most violent and poorest areas of São Paulo City in the 1990s. Even with a wonderful family, it would have been very easy for me to go along with some of my

friends and, like some of them, become a gang member or a drug addict, or end up in jail or even dead. But it did not happen, and I will explain why in a moment.

We have come together in the framework of the International Year of Youth in order to recognize an important chapter of our historical challenge to make visible the importance of young people and all of the issues that affect their lives. They are from different cultures and backgrounds: boys and girls, young men and women, poor and rich, from faith-based backgrounds and not. They are from my street, they are from the streets where you live, and they might not be celebrating this day with us.

Some of them who can understand the existence of forums such as this one are asking themselves right now: "What are those people doing? They talk, talk, talk, and absolutely nothing changes in my life. I am still knocking on doors to look for a job, and I cannot find one." This is a friend of mine from the fifth grade speaking. But along the way, my street has become much bigger, and I had the opportunity to meet a lot of young people. Another voice said to me: "I cannot say the things that I would like to, or properly express myself about my sexual orientation." Another friend walks only during daylight hours, to ensure that he will be alive at the end of the day. Others say: "I cannot tell people from my community that I have the right to decide when it comes to my own body, and that I should decide when to have sex or to get pregnant." "I would love to go to school, if I could find one, or even teachers, to help me grow."

More voices say: "I would stay in my country if I was not forced to leave because of incomprehensible wars, or even because I need to find ways to feed my family." "I would not be suffering from HIV/AIDS if someone had told me to use condoms, to have only one sexual partner, or maybe to wait longer for this step; even worse, I cannot even treat myself because of the price of the medicines."

Those are voices that I have heard in many, many streets. Here is one more: "I would have my legs to do some sports and to run if someone had not planted bombs because of conflicts that I do not understand, and that, to be honest, do not mean much to me or to my buddies, at least not enough to exchange for a life."

Could you imagine a world without young people? We cannot imagine that. When we look at unemployment rates, young people are at the top of the list. They are the most affected. When we look at the number of HIV infections, guess what? Young people — women especially — are also at the top of the list. When we watch news about the victims of violence, there they are again — young people. In all countries and regions of our common world, we find young people with fewer opportunities, marginalized young people, youth living with illiteracy, or even fatal diseases.

I could continue to describe many things: how we have been competent and efficient in creating a very hostile world for young people. The International Year of Youth will soon be coming to an end, but a great deal remains to be done. It is time to celebrate, but it also time for us to call on Governments, civil society, the private sector and the United Nations to seriously tackle the challenges faced by billions of young people in our world.

We all must understand that it is impossible to build solutions for a diverse world in the absence of a true partnership among all the important players in the youth field in many areas and at all levels. If we want to have a minimum chance of guaranteeing dignity, freedom, peace and a decent life for young people and for the population in general, a real and effective dialogue is absolutely crucial. It is time for us to build a strong commitment to improving the situation of young people around the world, especially for the marginalized young men and women who are suffering in various areas of the world and are oppressed in their thoughts, in their feelings and in their opportunities to act.

I am not saying that things have not changed or improved. They have. From my perspective, things have gotten better. The world is more prosperous for my generation than it was for previous ones. Some of the people here in this Hall are responsible for some of the changes we have seen. But we cannot sleep until we get things done; we cannot rest until we are sure that we are not going to listen to this kind of testimonial again, and we shall fulfil our responsibilities and commitments.

We are here to propose a deal: let us be partners. Let us move in the direction of more mutual trust and respect than we have now. We are here to say that youth-led organizations can help and are key to changing the situation, because we are rooted where the young people are. We know what they are feeling.

We know how to use resources more efficiently. We build solutions with young people at the grass-roots level through our everyday work, in both formal and non-formal education. Believe in us.

Youth civil society is inclusive in its nature, democratic in its processes and effective in its approaches. We are practicing those principles by empowering young people to be decision-makers and agents of change every single day.

We cooperate, and a good example of this is the International Coordination Meeting of Youth Organisations, a network of international youth non-governmental organizations and regional platforms that we are very proud to belong to. Let us work together towards the full implementation of the World Programme of Action on Youth. We do not need to recreate things. What we need is to see this ambitious Programme reflected in the policies and youth programmes of participants' countries. They must partner with us to strengthen the channels that allow their people to have their voices heard. They must take the chance of sharing responsibility and decision-making with us. They must make our structures more friendly for more young people to participate. We invite participants to implement programmes together at the global level.

However, to do so, we need resources — yes, resources. Some of those here are thinking, "There they are, asking for money again." Yes, we are. We do ask them to invest in young people and in their development. Investments for the full implementation of the World Programme of Action on Youth, youth-oriented organizations and programmes are needed at the national and international levels.

I urge participants to take note that, as a civil society we are very busy doing what we exist for, so we ask them to please make things less bureaucratic for us and let us spend the extra time by thinking of better ways to serve young people. After listening to all of this, they are probably asking themselves, "Do they not know that we are already informed about everything he just mentioned?" Yes, again, I know. We know. But it is so obvious that we should be asking ourselves why it is not happening.

I am about to conclude, and that is why I am going to synthesize some of the ideas. First, attention must be paid to marginalized young people. Secondly, responsibility must be shared with us. Thirdly, money must be invested in the World Programme of Action on Youth and in youth organizations. Fourthly, new policies and programmes must be designed and implemented to elevate the conditions of the younger population.

Before I end my speech, because I must, I will do what I have promised, I will tell participants why my story is different than those of some of my friends. It is because of an organization; it is because of the YMCA. The YMCA helped me to find something that I did not have when I was a teenager: self-esteem, self-confidence and friends to prove to me that I was capable of doing incredible things. With the YMCA, I have learned how to be a leader. I decided on the profession I wanted to have. I learned that I could dream anything, just because I am allowed to do so. I learned how to serve my community, and serving makes me very happy. I had the opportunity to be in good health by practicing sports, and to feel good by helping people as a volunteer, to sing, to dance and to understand that I am not a subject. I am a citizen. I can participate. I can make change.

I am one of 45 million served by the organization I come from, but this figure is much higher than 100 million if we take into consideration all the youth organizations represented here in this Hall today. We empower young people because we believe in youth and we exist for them. And because of the positive transformations I have experienced, I have decided to dedicate my life to this cause, as many of those in this Hall have done.

There is nothing about us without us. Nothing about young people should be without the participation of young people. If we act accordingly, the lights of hope and love will illuminate my own street and our streets in every corner of this world.

I am a youth with a dream so I will rise up, stand up and fight for my rights. Take me as a part of you. Do not see me as a subject, but as a citizen, and together we will rise. Let us sing.

The President (*spoke in French*): As members are aware, pursuant to resolution 65/267, this High-level Meeting will include plenary meetings and two thematic panel discussions.

The first panel discussion will take place this morning, immediately after the adjournment of this opening meeting, and is entitled "Strengthening

international cooperation regarding youth and enhancing dialogue, mutual understanding and active youth participation as indispensable elements towards achieving social integration, full employment and the eradication of poverty".

The second panel discussion, which will begin promptly at 3 p.m. in this Hall, is entitled "Challenges to youth development and opportunities for poverty eradication, employment and sustainable development".

The formal plenary meetings will take place tomorrow starting at 10 a.m. To enable maximum participation within the limited time available, I would ask speakers to respect their statement limits for formal plenary meetings, which are three minutes for statements made in a national capacity and five minutes when speaking on behalf of a group. In view of the long list of speakers and the limited time available, I propose that the outcome document (A/65/L.87) be adopted at the beginning of the first plenary meeting tomorrow morning, before statements by Member States are made.

Also, in the event that the Assembly does not finish the list of speakers by 6 p.m. tomorrow, we will hear summaries from the co-chairs of the thematic panel discussions at the end of the afternoon plenary and will then continue with the list of speakers at a later date to be announced.

The meeting rose at 11 a.m.